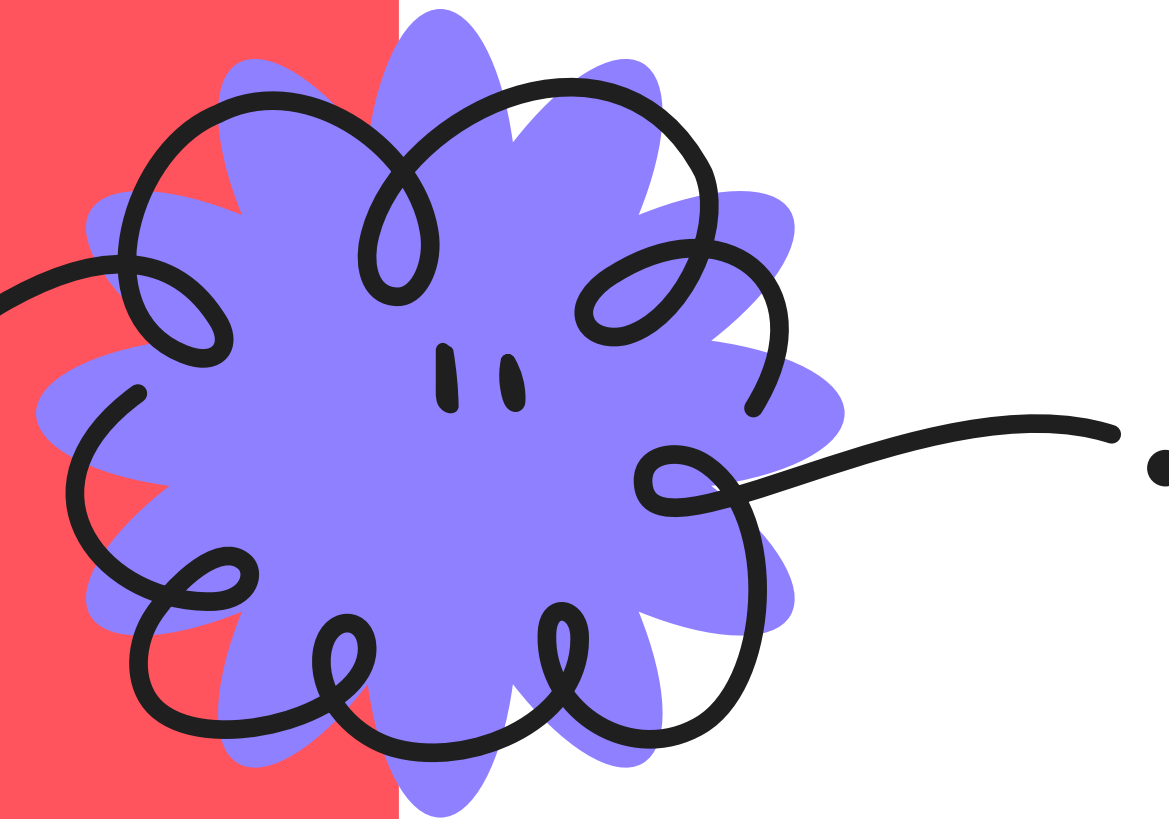


m.
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Mental Health & Wellbeing Starter Guide

A guide for school staff involved in My Mind Check, a free, voluntary and evidence-based digital mental health and wellbeing check-in for Australian schools.



Delivered by



MACQUARIE
University
SYDNEY · AUSTRALIA

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Follow this guide

This guide supports school staff who have limited experience or training in the field of mental health and wellbeing, but who are involved in the My Mind Check process.

Recommendations and resources provided by My Mind Check aim to assist schools but must be used in alignment with the privacy and health requirements of your state or territory, as well as those specific to your school.

Student check-in outcomes will typically be communicated to caregivers and/or students via written or verbal communication, following the process outlined in the **Follow-up Guide**. However, during or after a check-in, students who are experiencing mental health concerns may feel more inclined to engage with the school community for support. Consult this guide for tips on approaching mental health and wellbeing concerns in a safe and positive way.



Impacting about 14% of young Australians, poor mental health inherently emerges as a matter of concern and consideration for schools.

My Mind Check

Macquarie University
Wallumattagal Campus
Macquarie Park NSW 2109

My Mind Check School Support Team

T: 1300 606 770 (8am–4pm weekdays)

E: support@mymindcheck.org.au

mymindcheck.org.au

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Attending to a student who becomes distressed during the check-in

If a student becomes distressed during the check-in:

- Check on them and let them know that participation in the check-in is voluntary, and there is no pressure to continue answering questions.
- Give them time to wind down, but do not leave them on their own.
- If the student leaves the room in distress, immediately send someone to check on them and escort them to a wellbeing staff member or a suitable alternative staff member.

Contextualise problematic behaviour

It is important to recognise that problematic behaviour could be a symptom of mental health and wellbeing difficulties experienced by the student. Maintain an open-mind and, where possible, check on the wellbeing of the student.

Helping a student with strong emotions

Your approach to comforting a distressed student will vary depending on the situation. For instance, if a child becomes upset in front of their peers, allow them to sit in a private, comfortable space within the classroom or an alternative space within your view, or be escorted to another suitable school staff member (for example, the school wellbeing team).

Support the student to engage in calming activities. Encourage them to:

- have a drink of water
- take some deep breaths
- sit with you quietly

Maintain a calm and kind demeanour, provide simple clear instructions, and minimise your questions.

- “ Grab a drink of water, and then come and sit over here with me.
- “ Let’s take three deep breaths.
- “ Let’s just sit here together until you are feeling a bit better.



Once the child has calmed down, you can gently start a conversation to understand what triggered their upsetting feelings.

Consider everything you know about the student

Consider all the information you know about the student. This will lead to a more meaningful and tailored conversation based on the individual student's needs. For example, if a student is upset, and they have a close friend or supportive sibling at the school, you could ensure they are brought together in the next break from class. If the student has a difficult relationship with their caregivers, you could set them up with an appointment with the School Counsellor.






For ideas on other aspects of the student to consider, view the [Student Snapshot](#) >

Stay within your area of expertise

You have an array of important roles and duties as a school staff member who does not have specific experience or training in the mental health and wellbeing space. However, you are not expected to solve the mental health concerns of your students. In fact, it could be harmful to you and the student to take on issues beyond your expertise.

Contribute to a positive school environment

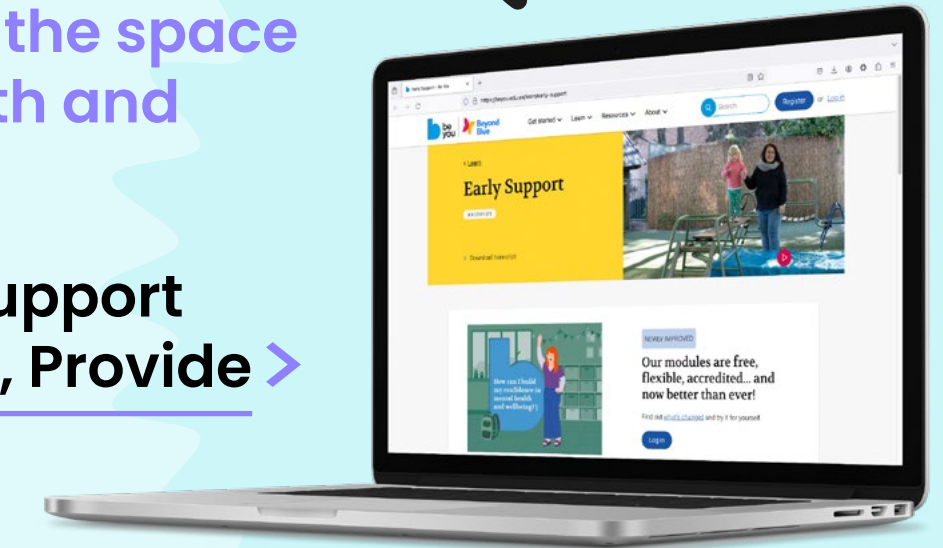
Instead, you can support positive mental health within schools by:

-  Maintaining a kind and non-judgemental stance towards mental health, with the assumption that, at any given time, some students or school staff will be having a tough day and/or experiencing a mental health issue.
-  Checking on students who seem to be struggling, or ensuring that another suitable adult will do so.
-  Considering helpful programs and supportive accommodations for students who are struggling with their mental health.
-  Familiarising yourself with reputable sources of mental health information and support, and sharing this knowledge with students and caregivers. *
-  Developing positive relationships with caregivers of struggling students, whenever possible.

* Visit mymindcheck.org.au for information and nationally available support services.

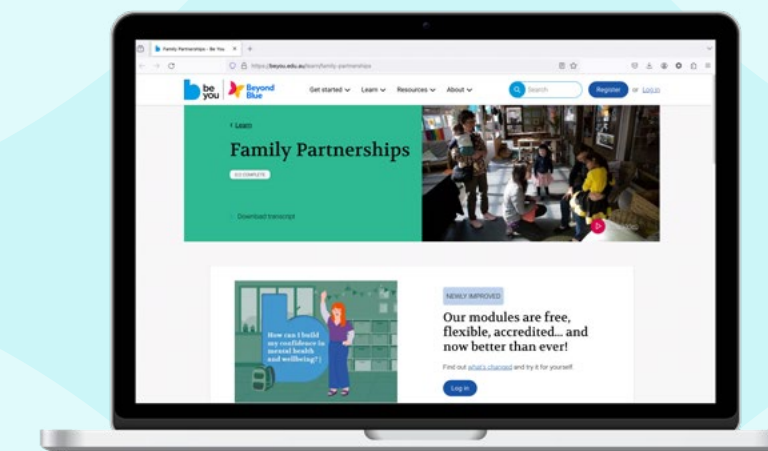
Learn about your role as an educator in the space of mental health and wellbeing:

[Be You: Early Support Notice, Enquire, Provide](#) >



Learn about forming positive family partnerships:

[Be You: Family Partnerships Partner and Assist](#) >



Speaking to a student about their mental health

When speaking to a student about their mental health and wellbeing, it is important to have enough time for a calm and thoughtful dialogue. Avoid discussions when either of you are rushed.

Start the conversation

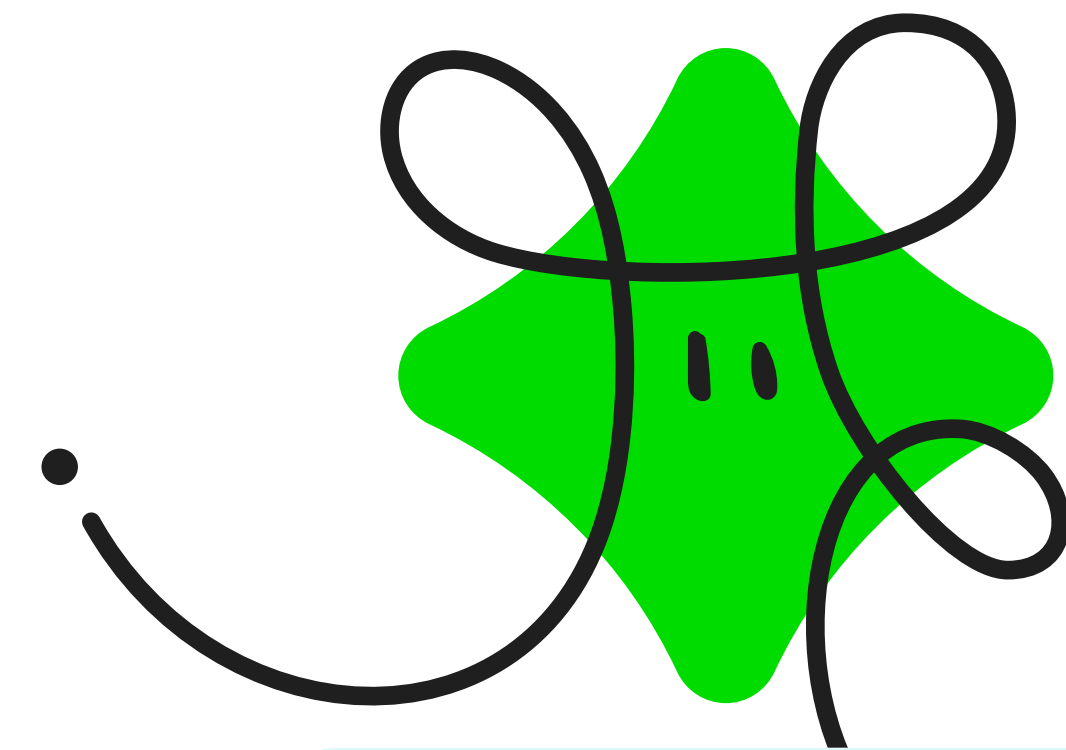
Open the conversation in a friendly and approachable way and confirm or clarify how they are feeling.

- “ The information you shared during your check-in suggests you might be feeling ... at the moment. Does that sound right to you?
- “ I’ve noticed that you are... (not sitting with your friends anymore/not doing your homework/crying a lot/often angry/making negative comments about yourself/posting sad and angry messages online), and I just wanted to see if you are okay?

Practice patience

It can be difficult for a young person to know how to express their thoughts or identify their feelings. They may also be hesitant and worried about how you might react. Be calm. Be kind. Be patient and allow room for silence.

If the student does not want to talk, reassure them that they are welcome to seek you out later. Consider a discussion about who else they might feel comfortable to confide in, and provide them with a link to the [My Mind Check website](#) >, where they can access information and learn about support services.



Listen well and respond

Respond to the student in a way that shows you have heard them. Clearly and briefly summarise what the student has said, and how they feel. Do not add any extra information or interpretation. For example:

- “ What I am hearing is you feel as though...
- “ It sounds like you are having some challenges with...
- “ So, the situation has left you feeling...

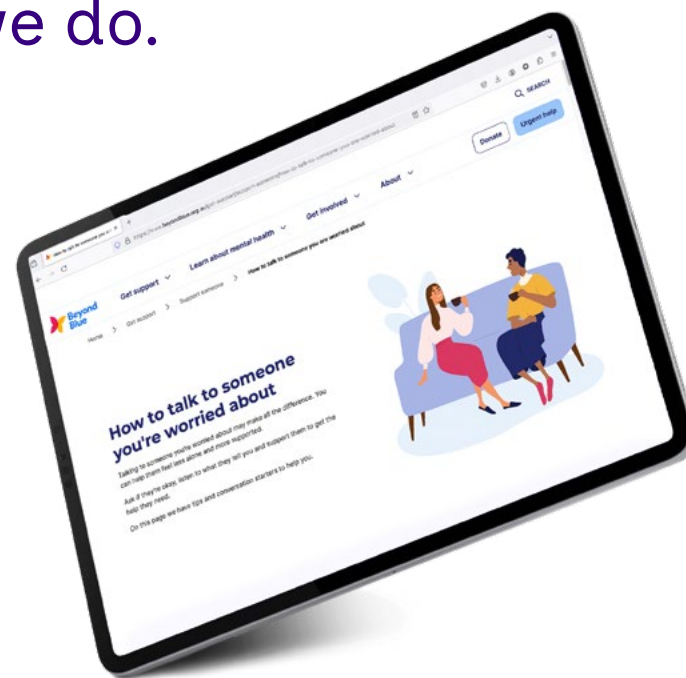
Empathise

Convey understanding and support by showing empathy. For example:

- “ That sounds difficult. I can understand why you are feeling that way.
- “ It’s okay if you are not sure why you are feeling that way. It is not always clear why we feel the way we do.

[Learn more conversation tips:](#)

Beyond Blue:
[How to talk to someone you’re worried about >](#)



Similar principles (for example, being patient, listening well, empathising and avoiding judgement and stigma) apply when speaking with caregivers.

[For an example of how to share My Mind Check outcomes with a caregiver refer to our Conversation with caregivers script >](#)

Avoid judgement and stigma

Mental health stigma experienced by young people often involves others minimising their experience and/or treating their difficulties as a personal failing or character flaw. Examples of this include statements like:

- “ That doesn’t sound so bad, it could be a lot worse.
- “ I think you just need to find some gratitude.
- “ You are a bit sensitive; you might need to toughen up.
- “ You need to learn to be more resilient.
- “ Is this just a cry for attention?
- “ Don’t you think you are being a bit silly/dramatic/lazy?

You may not fully understand their issue, but you can meet their concerns with an open-mind and kindness.



[Learn about recommended language when discussion mental health:](#)

Mental Health Coordinating Council:
[Recovery Oriented Language Guide Words Matter 2022 >](#)



Keep the student informed before extra communication with their caregivers

Students have been informed about, and agreed to, their check-in outcomes being shared with their caregivers. However, this does not mean you have blanket permission to share extra information with caregivers obtained from discussions with the student. In the absence of risk (that is, serious concern about the wellbeing of the child), it is important to seek the student's permission before sharing extra information with their caregiver(s).

Let the student know why you think it is a good plan, or an essential step, to talk to their caregiver(s). Present this information in a laid-back and friendly way. If the process is too formal and intimidating, they might avoid sharing their feelings in the future. For example:

“ Let's get mum or dad in on this conversation, so we can all brainstorm ideas that might help.

Explore student concerns regarding communication with their caregivers

Some students may express a preference against involving their caregiver(s). It is useful to ask the student the reason for their hesitance for caregiver involvement. For example:

“ What worries you about me contacting your parents?

Ask for suggestions for how they would like you to approach this discussion; for example:

“ Would you like to be part of my meeting with your mum or dad, or would you prefer that it happen without you?

“ Would you like listen in on our discussion?


“ Is there a way I could best approach this with your mum or dad?


“ What wording would you prefer me to use to describe your feelings/concerns/actions?

“ What parts are you most comfortable with me sharing?

Consider the nature of their concerns

There is an array of possible reasons for a student's apprehension to involve caregivers. Carefully consider the nature of these concerns and the best interests of the student when determining your approach.* For instance:

 A student might experience shyness and feel embarrassed about the disclosure. In this case, the student might benefit from you broaching the subject with their family in a calm and laid-back way to normalise mental health and wellbeing discussions within their family unit.

 Another student may feel that involvement from their caregivers may cause them further difficulties or create disunity within their family. This student may benefit from regular conversations with the school counsellor, rather than significant, or any, involvement of their family.*

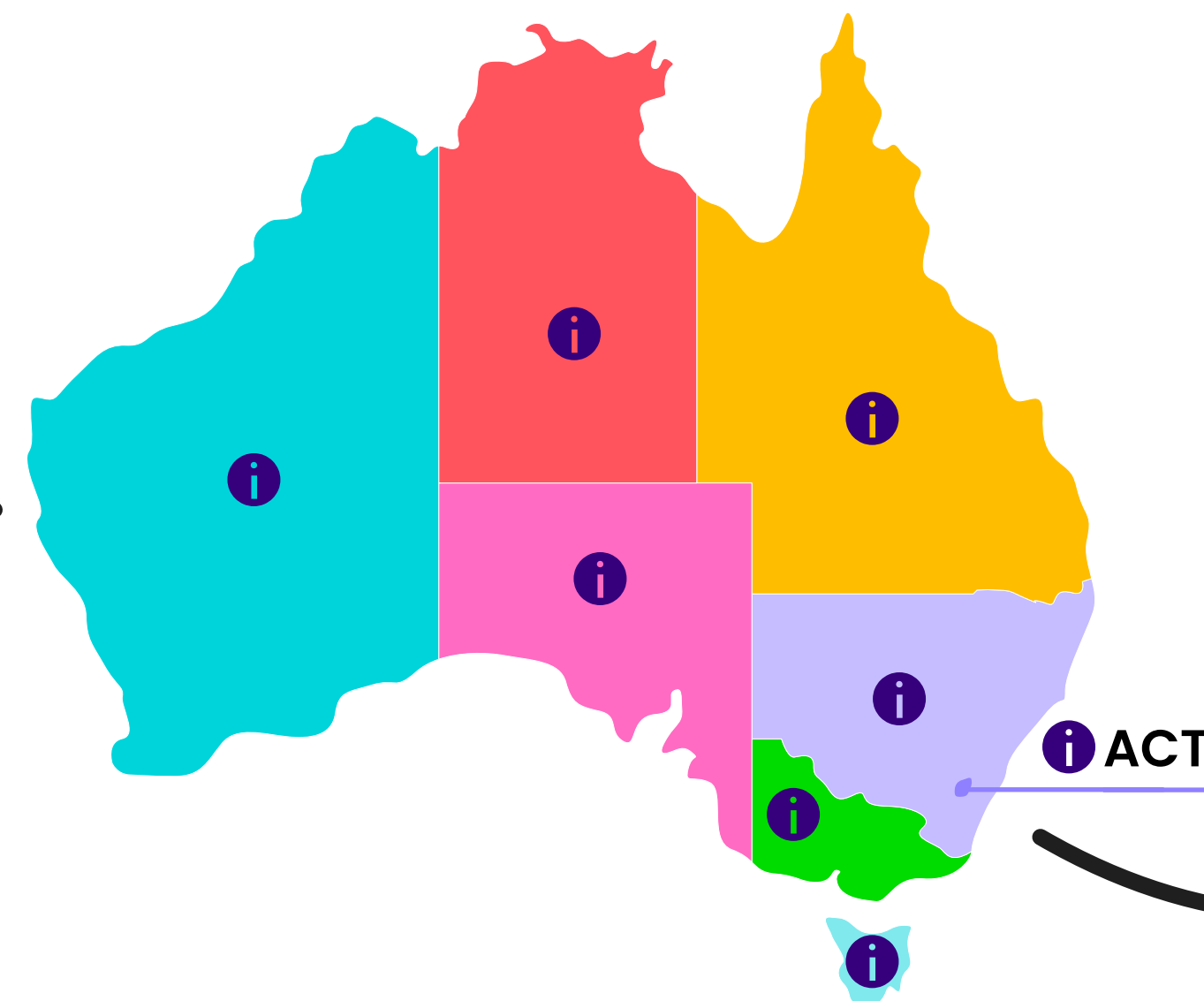
**Remember, this is an option in the absence of risk (that is, serious concerns about the wellbeing of the student), and as a result of conversations with the student. In relation to the outcomes of the check-in, you must abide by the process outlined in your consent form. In most schools, this means check-in outcomes will be communicated to the person who provided consent for the student, if the student is identified as struggling (red) or vulnerable (amber).*

Familiarise yourself with instances of mandatory disclosure

The disclosure of information is mandatory in certain situations, including suspected or confirmed cases of child abuse or neglect, concerns over a suicide risk, and plans for a student to harm themselves or others. You must strictly adhere to your school's policies and legal requirements in these instances.

To maintain the trust and respect of the student, transparency about your obligations to disclose, and to whom you must disclose, is recommended.

Learn about your state education department's approach to child protection:



Learn about school suicide prevention and response:

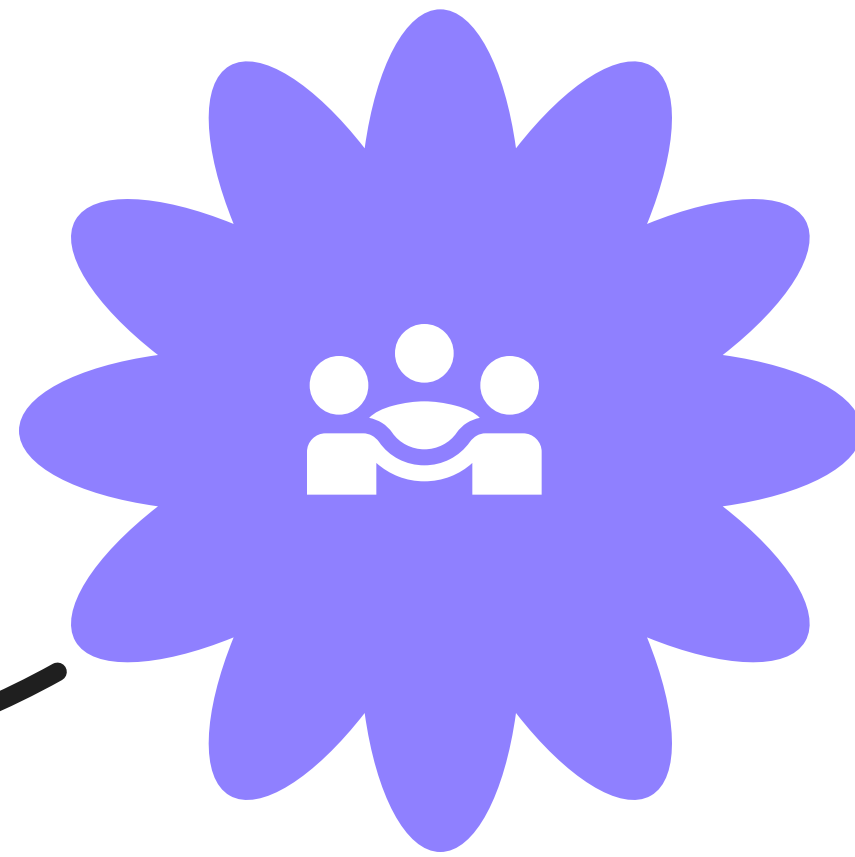
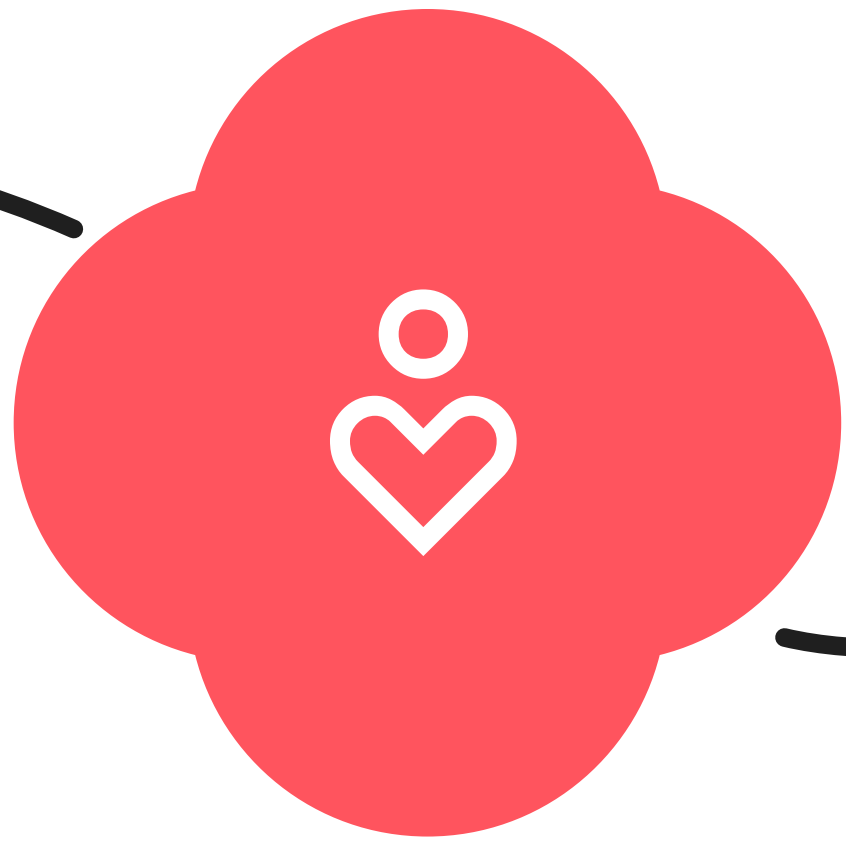
[Be You: Suicide Risk Assessment >](#)

[Be You: Suicide Prevention >](#)

[Be You: Suicide Response and Postvention Toolkit >](#)

[Orygen: Self-harm and young people >](#)





Respect the student's autonomy

Involve the student in decision-making.
For example:

- “ In terms of next steps, what would you like to happen?
- “ Do you have any thoughts on what you might find helpful here at school?

Bridge the gap to support

Bridge the gap between students and support services.* Students may theoretically know that services are available for young people but may not reach out regarding their problems and concerns.

- “ There are many free support services for young people. Next time you are feeling really sad/worried/lonely/angry, you could consider contacting them. They help many young people with lots of different problems.

**Visit mymindcheck.org.au for information and nationally available support services.*

Encourage the student to continue the conversation, and seek feedback

- “ Would you like to catch up with me again next week/fortnight to talk about how you're going?
- “ Do you find these conversations helpful? Is there anything I can do differently to make this process easier for you?

Let's help students reach their potential

Poor mental health affects about 14% of children, which impacts their educational potential.

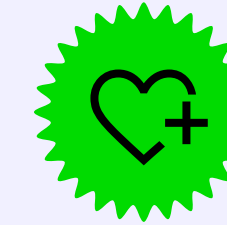
By Year 9, young people experiencing mental health concerns are on average two years behind their peers.

Research shows that by conducting mental health and wellbeing checks in schools, we can dramatically improve educational outcomes for children.

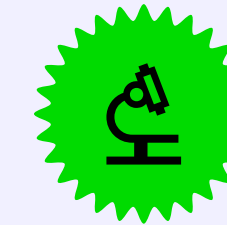
Australian schools can access My Mind Check, a free digital mental health plus wellbeing check tool expertly designed for schools.



Free and easy to use



Combines mental health and wellbeing



Based on evidence; it's tried and tested



Provides individual summaries with follow-up guidelines for schools to help support students



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